

# No Room for Compromise

OPINION    ESSAY    BY    ELLEN    GOODMAN

The car in front of me bears this year's bumper sticker: Fur is dead. This news does not come as a surprise. Nor does the bumper sticker.

The photograph in the magazine on my desk shows a trapper with his foot on the throat of an animal. The copy talks about "the practice of peeling the skins from tormented animals to feed human vanity." It is one of many I've seen.

The pickets on the fanciest street in town are equally blunt. No one can enter the store unaware that the coats inside are made of dead animals.

These are just a few of the messages in the concerted effort to strip glamour off the backs of the two-footed, fur-bearing species called humans. The anti-fur folk are determined to enlighten or intimidate or at least embarrass consumers out of their skins.

The furriers in turn are equally determined to trap these opponents in their own logic. The counter-ads warn that the anti-fur advocates are not merely after lynx and minks but leather and steaks.

On one of the televised talk shows, I watched such zealots make their points recently and had trouble deciding which was the more appalling advocate. One raged about the frivolous cruelty to animals, and the consumer as accomplice to murder. The other cited the Bible as proof that humans had dominion over all the species.

But there is little moral distinction to be made between wearing a mink coat and wearing a goose-down coat; between killing an animal to wear it and killing one to eat it. There is even less distinction from the viewpoint of the animal.

Environmental purity, the ability to live a life without a single cruel act against nature, is impossible. So people make compromises.

But they are rarely as dogmatic as those set down by the anti-fur brigade.

Is it wrong to wear wild creatures, to eat wild birds? Is it morally superior to kill what is raised to that end? Is a modern mink ranch more cruel than a modern chicken farm? Is it acceptable to wear fur for warmth, but unacceptable to wear it for fashion? Should we only wear what we would eat? Are animals that kill each other immoral?

The list of questions expands to an absurd exponential. The only pure answer is to avoid the use—or exploitation—of any other species. To neither walk on, nor sit on, nor devour any other creature. And, even then, who can say what toll the alternatives—from cotton fields to chemicals to farmlands—would take on human lives and the environment we share.

People make choices in these matters from the first time they knowingly eat a hamburger or catch a fish. We acknowledge ourselves as creatures of nature. Not many believe that animals were put on earth solely for human use. But most see our lives in a plan that isn't always benign.

The furriers may use delicate euphemisms to deny the harsh reality. They call rabbit lapin, and raccoon tanuki. But the anti-fur extremists prefer to win by intimidation. They have staked out a moral position that leaves no room for the way we live. It is, in its own peculiar way, unnatural.